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SUBJECT: SOCIALIST PARTY KICKS OFF CAMPAIGN TO VOTE "YES"
ON PROPOSED EU CONSTITUTION

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 b and d.

11. (U) Summary: France's Socialist Party (PS) kicked off ahead of schedule a campaign intended to promote a "yes" vote among left-leaning voters in the referendum on the proposed EU Constitution tentatively scheduled for next June. Among the slogans chosen for this campaign is "Yes to a stronger Europe able to stand up to the United States." Recent polls show that a clear majority of likely voters continues to favor the proposed constitution but by a narrowing margin. Worries that low overall voter turn-out for the referendum, coupled with high turn-out of "no" voters, could result in rejection of the proposed constitution has infused urgency into the "yes" camp's plans to educate and energize its voter base. END SUMMARY.

FRANCOIS HOLLANDE KICKS OFF "YES" CAMPAIGN AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

12. (U) On February 14, Socialist party national secretary Francois Hollande kicked off ahead of schedule the PS's campaign aimed at convincing left-leaning voters to vote "yes" in the upcoming referendum on the proposed EU Constitution. The decision to accelerate the start of the campaign was prompted by a desire to "steal a march" on the opposition center-right, take ownership of the issue and -- the PS hopes -- lead the debate, both on the question of yes or no to the proposed constitution and on the domestic political issues that will spill out from it. In addition, recent polls are showing a weakening of support for the proposed constitution among likely voters -- 60 percent "yes", 40 percent "no," a 5 percent rise in the "no" tally compared to a month ago. Furthermore, within the PS and its allies -- such as the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) whose members voted by 82 percent against the pro-constitutional position of the their labor federation's executive board -- the question of "yes" or "no" to the proposed constitution remains embroiled in other issues, such as Turkey's accession to the EU and fears that the constitution will increase social dislocation by forcing further market liberalization on France.

PS CAMPAIGN USES U.S. TO CALL FOR "A STRONGER EUROPE"

13. (C) The campaign in support of a "yes" vote will be anchored by 3,750 large billboards throughout France which will say, "With all the Socialists of Europe, say yes to the Constitutional Treaty." In addition to this lead theme that focuses on the way the socialist parties of all other EU Member States (except Malta) support the proposed constitution, the campaign will include smaller posters touting five other slogans, one of which will be "Yes to a stronger Europe able to stand up to the United States." ("Oui a une Europe plus forte face aux Etats-Unis".) COMMENT: Clearly, in the view of PS strategists, anti-American sentiment remains strong enough, particularly among left-leaning voters, to make proposing that Europe should be able to challenge U.S. leadership an incentive to vote for the constitution. END COMMENT.

"YES" CAMP FOCUSES ON OVERALL VOTER TURN-OUT

14. (C) Voter apathy, along with the realization that anti-constitution forces -- even if motivated by anti-Turkey, or anti-liberalization, or just anti-Chirac sentiments -- are intent on turning out their "no" voters in the upcoming referendum has infused urgency into pro-constitutionalists' planning to educate and energize their voter base. Polls show that a clear majority of likely voters continues to favor the proposed EU Constitution, but by a margin that has narrowed steadily during the past three months. Pro-constitutionalists of both left and right fear that a low, overall voter turn-out for the referendum, coupled with a high turn-out of motivated, "protest" voters could skew referendum results against the proposed constitution. On the left, this has prompted the PS's early opening of its pro-constitution campaign. On the right, this has prompted

the government of President Chirac to explore the possibility of moving up the date of the referendum to late May (from mid June) in the expectation that that would increase overall turn-out and give opponents less time to stir up divisions and resentments unrelated to the constitutional question.
Leach